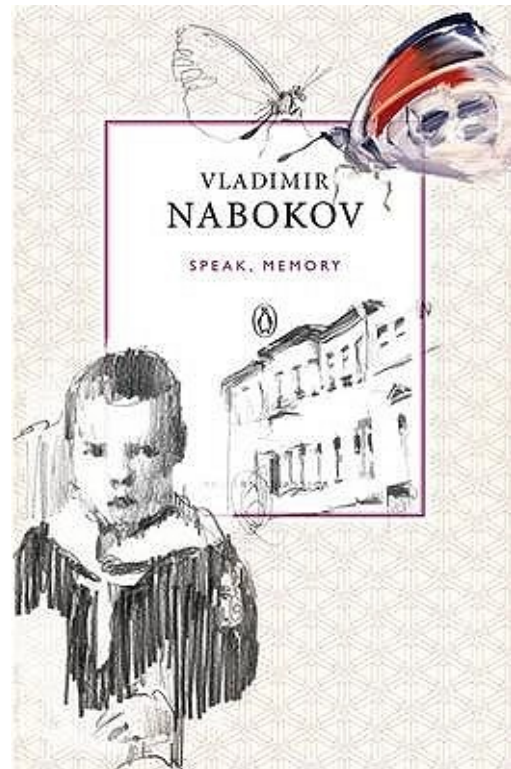
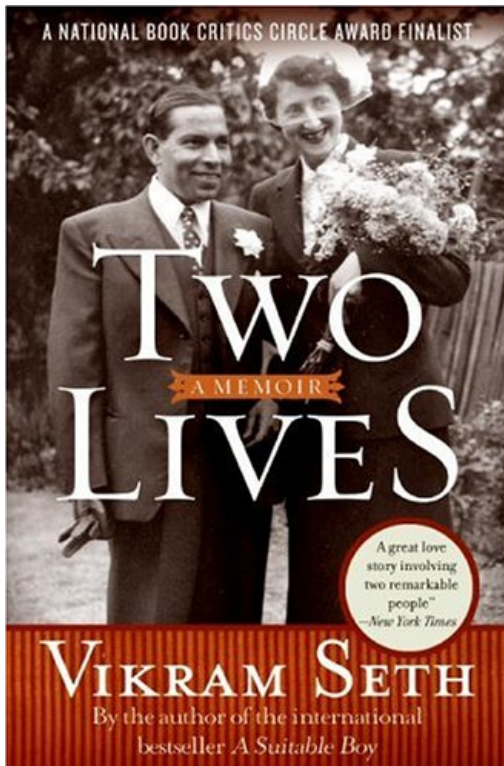


**Countries, Continents, or the Entire Globe as a Home:
The Influence of Language and Migration on Identity
in Vikram Seth's *Two Lives* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory***



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Introduction

Vikram Seth and Vladimir Nabokov both wrote about the experience of migrants and refugees in relation to identity. The notion of exile can be found in both their works. Nabokov was born in Russia ruled by Tsar Nicholas II. He was forced into exile due to the Russian revolution and he was forced into exile again when the fascism of Hitler's Germany threatened his freedom and that of his Jewish wife, Véra. In his autobiography *Speak, Memory*, he describes his life as an exile and his movements from his hometown to Crimea, Germany, France, England and eventually to the United States. The work consist of Nabokov's memories which are bundled into one work resembling a novel due to its structure. Vikram Seth was born in India, and he has lived and studied in England, the United States and China. Seth's work *Two Lives* can be compared to that of Nabokov because Seth and his family show different forms of cosmopolitanism in which migration, exile and language play a notable role which can also be seen in Nabokov's work. In *Two Lives*, he depicts the two lives of his relatives who experienced exile: his Indian uncle, Shanti Seth, and his German aunt, Henny Seth-Caro. He does this while also describing events from his own life. These two works will be compared and contrasted to provide an insight in exile and migration in relation to literature and identity.

Both works claim to possess a certain degree of truth. Nabokov mentions that he checked various facts after the first publication of the individual chapters:

Details of date and circumstance were checked, and it was found that in many cases I had erred, or had not examined deeply enough an obscure but fathomable recollection. (...) What I still have not been able to rework through want of specific documentation, I have now preferred to delete for the sake of over-all truth. (Nabokov xiii)

Likewise, Seth describes how he visited archives like Yad Vashem (Seth 237) and names various sources, like the family chronicle called *Seths of Biswan* (62). It could be argued that these descriptions of fact finding serve their own purpose in the works. Francis R. Hart analyses the autobiography and notes that "Kazin observes that Hemingway, Nabokov, Dalhberg, and others like them are autobiographers who *simply use the appearance* of fact to produce enjoyable narrative, "designed even when the author does not say so, to make a fable of his life, to tell a story, to create a pattern of incident, to make a dramatic point." Yet, he acknowledges, the creative writer "turns to autobiography out of some creative longing that

fiction has not satisfied”” (Kazin in Hart 487). Furthermore, “[t]here is, as Norman Holland observes, nothing in an autobiographical passage itself to distinguish history from fiction. Response is determined strictly by the expectation the reader brings” (Hart 488). The distinction between what is fact and what is fiction can be unclear and the author may try to shed light on the difference between the author and the character bearing the same name.

Some autobiographers intend at first to delineate an “I” that is comprehensive, essential, total, while others intend initially only a partial personal truth, chronologically or analytically restricted. Such initial intentions may prove unstable or illusory, and the autobiographer’s idea of what is total or essential (...) may not persuade or satisfy the reader. Moreover, the “total” autobiographer often discovers motives for restriction or refocusing that he had not anticipated. (Hart 493)

Seth wrote himself into the biography of his uncle and aunt, but the character called Vikram Seth is too significant to serve as just a supporting character. He goes into great detail about his own life and his own feelings, deliberations and life choices. Therefore, I shall consider those parts of *Two Lives* as an autobiography within the work because it simplifies the task of comparing and contrasting Nabokov, Seth, Shanti and Henny. Furthermore, while keeping the deliberations from Hart’s article in mind, I will assume that the narrators in *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory* can be conflated with the characters and the authors called Vikram Seth and Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov respectively.

The field of literary criticism does not offer many comparisons between Vikram Seth and Vladimir Nabokov. It seems that these two authors have not been thoroughly analysed in relation to each other. Nevertheless, the connection between the two has been seen. For instance, in his review of Douglas Hofstadter’s translation of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, Adrian Wanner states that “Pushkin’s sonnet-like stanzas in iambic tetrameter with the rhyme scheme ABABCCDDEFEGG had been adopted by Vikram Seth in his 1986 verse novel *The Golden Gate*. Intrigued by this pattern, Hofstadter contacted Seth who pointed to Charles Johnston’s English translation of *Eugene Onegin* as his source of inspiration” (Wanner 83). Wanner also relates that Hofstadter read other translations of *Onegin* and notes how Hofstadter argues “against Nabokovian literalism” (83). In fact, Wanner argues that it “is true that Hofstadter himself can have his Nabokovian moments (...) But Hofstadter certainly has a point when he criticizes Nabokov’s intolerant dismissal of any attempt at verse-for-verse translation” (84). In short, Hofstadter was motivated by Seth’s work to engage Pushkin, but he offers criticism towards Nabokov’s work. In *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory*, both Seth and Nabokov state that they are inspired by Pushkin, yet Wanner, obviously focussed on

Hofstadter's translation rather than on connecting Seth to Nabokov, does not go into this shared source of inspiration. Sidney Monas, when comparing ways to translate works like *Eugene Onegin*, notes that in Nabokov's translation "the main burden (...) is carried not in the text but in the footnote" (Monas 7). This contrasts with other translations of *Eugene Onegin* and Monas also notes that "Vikram Seth, without any Russian, but with a remarkable gift both for narrative and versification, and with an extraordinary rhyming vocabulary and ear for enjambment has employed the *Onegin* stanza" (7-8). It appears that Monas recognised Pushkin as source of inspiration for both Seth and Nabokov, but he chooses not to pursue this any further because it is not the aim of his paper. In short, Seth and Nabokov have been loosely connected via Pushkin, but their similarities regarding the use of migration and identity in their work have not been examined together.

Both *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory* describe the issue of language and the effect it had on Seth and Nabokov respectively. Both works describe how the author learned more than one language next to his native language. Seth learned German in order to gain access to western education and he learned English to live in England and to enrol at a university in the United States. Contrary to what one might expect, he did not learn English in India, a former British colony, because his grandmother decided that he would learn English in England and focussed on speaking Hindi with him instead (Seth 5). Furthermore, he describes how his uncle learned German and almost lost the ability to speak Hindi. Although Nabokov also learns to speak French and English next to Russian, he learns the languages during his childhood and he has shown code switching in his speech. It can be noted how Nabokov comments on language in almost all his works and often he incorporates multilingualism into his characters as well. Likewise, both Nabokov and Seth comment on the effect language can have on an individual in relation to society for a non-native speaker. The relevance of language in these works for this paper is the fact that languages learnt by choice are depicted as becoming part of the language learners' identity. The language learnt out of necessity are neglected or even discarded.

The aim of this thesis will be to compare and contrast Vikram Seth's *Two Lives* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* in order to acquire an insight into identity, belonging and selfhood of migrants and refugees via literary works. The relevance is universal and timeless, because migration and exile continue to play a role in the lives of many. The personal accounts of Seth and Nabokov can inspire migrants to relate their own narrative in a literary way. Furthermore, *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory* can provide a different perspective to the non-migrant living in a receiving country. These works show that migration by choice can

lead to the acquisition of language and culture while those who are exiled tend to cherish the language and customs of the place they had to leave behind. Although exile may be more traumatic, *Speak*, *Memory* and *Two Lives* show that voluntary migration has a larger impact on an individual's identity than forced migration.

Voluntary and Involuntary Migration in *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory*

The amount of migration described in Vikram Seth's *Two Lives* and in Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* is not just vast because of the willingness to travel of some of the protagonists in these works, but also because of the political situation which forced people to migrate. Furthermore, Vikram Seth, Shanti and Henny are all protagonists in *Two Lives*, but it must be noted that Seth is the only one of those three who did not suffer from the effects of historical events to such a large extent. Most of the characters depicted in *Speak, Memory*, mainly Nabokov himself as narrator and as protagonist, are in exile due to either the Russian revolution or the Second World War. However, all characters in both works, Seth, Nabokov, Shanti, Henny and Véra, are globalised individuals and each of them displays a unique form of cosmopolitanism. In her article, Barnita Bagchi briefly analyses the concept of cosmopolitanism and explains that "[t]he cosmopolitan is a citizen of the world, a metaphorically rich concept with tremendous practical difficulties" (Bagchi 104). Anyone has the potential to be a cosmopolitan because those who do not become a cosmopolitan by choice can become one because of external stimuli, like politics and war. These two perspectives on cosmopolitanism can be found in both works. Therefore, Bagchi's statement that "*Two Lives* is a book about borders, boundaries, the closing of borders, and the crossing into new borders to forge lives in new places" (101) can also be applied to *Speak, Memory*. The notion that migration, as shown in *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory*, affects an individual's identity will be analysed in this chapter in relation to these two texts.

Seth managed to retrace his uncle's steps via interviews with Shanti when he was still alive, letters and other supposedly lost documents retrieved from Shanti and Henny's attic, interviews with other family members and his own recollections. Furthermore, it could be argued that Shanti and Vikram Seth are very much alike because they both left India to improve themselves by studying abroad. In fact, it was Shanti's older brother, Raj, who encouraged travelling in order to study. According to Seth, Shanti initially wanted to be an engineer, but he failed entrance examination (Seth 72). Subsequently, "Raj told him that if [Shanti] still wanted to become an engineer, he would get in touch with an acquaintance of his at the Skoda works in Czechoslovakia, who would be able to get him a job there that would allow him to attend classes in the evening" (72), but Shanti refused and Raj suggested that he could try dentistry instead. Shanti was offered places to study dentistry in Berlin and Paris, and Seth relates how Shanti did not travel via the most obvious route to Europe, "[i]nstead, he

went from Banaras to Karachi by train, then to Basra by boat, to Bagdad by train, across the desert to Rutba Wells and Haifa in a car (...); to Athens and Marseilles on a heavily overcrowded boat, and thence, by train (...) to Paris” (73). However, a series of unfortunate events lead him to dislike Paris and he decided to travel to London to meet with his sister who already lived in London. Next, he “travelled by ship and train to Berlin” (75) and went on to study dentistry there. These descriptions of the extended travels Shanti undertook for his studies show how Shanti may not have been interested in travelling or migrating per se, but that he was interested mainly in obtaining a proper education. It seems that he and Raj concluded that Shanti’s best change for studying with a good perspective was going abroad. As a result, Shanti changed from being an Indian citizen to being a global cosmopolitan.

By comparison, Vikram Seth also went to Europe for his education, but he did not have a close relative suggesting a journey to another continent. So Seth’s reason for travelling to Europe is the same as Shanti’s, but the difference is that Seth’s motivation was internal instead of external. He “had won a scholarship to study (...) at Tonbridge on the basis of [his] final exams” (8). However, in contrast to Shanti’s older brother motivating him, Seth’s mother was opposed to him travelling to England because it might corrupt him. Nevertheless, he was able to go because Shanti promised to watch him and Seth relates: “Had he not been in England, I doubt Mama would have let me go” (8). In other words, if Shanti had not travelled to Europe for his studies, then Seth would not have travelled either. Seth transfers from Tonbridge to Oxford and even applies at American universities. He decides to avoid “snow and rain” and enrolls at Stanford University in California to continue his studies in economics “though this meant [he] would be even further away, both from [Shanti and Henny] and from [his] parents” (25). Another choice he made regarding his studies was going to China. However, Seth had to wait a long time for permission from the Chinese Ministry of Education to study in China. He states that “it was too late to choose a new Ph.D. subject unrelated to China, and to research, write and defend it” (29) so, without the Chinese permission, he “would have to go back home with [his] studies incomplete” (29) because his scholarship and his other funds had almost been depleted. However, his wait is not in vain and he studies in China for two years during which he also visits Tibet and writes a book, called *From Heaven Lake*, about this trip (33). It appears that his stubborn decision to go to China was a turning point in his life. The enterprise could have backfired if the Chinese authorities rejected Seth’s plans to visit the country. Bagchi notes that “Vikram’s supple yet confident dynamic cosmopolitanism marks out the entire book” (Bagchi 107) and it could be said that it marks out his life as well. On the one hand, it could be argued that, when comparing his travel and

migratory movements to those of his uncle, Seth's chosen path may have been influenced by the path of Shanti. On the other hand, it could also be argued that, since Seth was not obligated to travel the globe the way he did, he took advantage of the decades of peace that followed the decades of war. *Two Lives* does not provide a clear answer regarding Seth's motivation for studying abroad and consequently becoming a cosmopolitan individual. A logical conclusion would be that it was a combination of his character, the possibilities offered by a peaceful era and the example set by Shanti which steered Seth towards being a global citizen.

The contrast between the decisions that Shanti and Vikram Seth were able to make regarding their education on the one hand and the path Nabokov took towards studying outside his country of origin on the other hand could not have been larger. "It was arranged that [his] brother and [Nabokov] would go up to Cambridge, on a scholarship awarded more in atonement for political tribulations than in acknowledgement of intellectual merit" (Nabokov 192). By comparison, Seth also went to England on a scholarship, but these two are hardly comparable since Seth did obtain his scholarship via intellectual means. Nevertheless, Nabokov's merit might have been sufficient had it been evaluated fairly because of his intensive tutoring during his childhood. Whether or not this tutoring would have been sufficient for him and his brother to enrol at a prestigious institution like Cambridge is unclear. Nabokov describes many of his tutors, but, since he describes them from memory, the descriptions are personal rather than useful in order to judge their merit. The Nabokov brothers might have been able to complete their Cambridge studies regardless of the path they took to enrol, but it could be argued that their traumatic flight from Russia shaped their identity extensively and provided them with an extra boost of willpower to study hard. Furthermore, one might wonder whether they would have studied outside of Russia without the Russian revolution, but, considering the international orientation of the Nabokov family shown by, for example, the use of "Anglo-Saxon products" (53), it is unlikely that they would not have been encouraged to study abroad. However, Nabokov did not have this luxury of choice due the revolutionary political situation during his adolescence which forced him to abandon his home.

Just like Nabokov, Henny was forced to abandon her home country due to political unrest. At first glance, their cases may seem different: the upper class Nabokov had to flee because he was both the son of a liberal politician and because he was part of the upper class at the dawn of a Communist revolt, and the middle class Henny had to flee because she and her family were Jewish in a country where a political party both incited and benefitted from

the anti-Semitic public sentiments. In fact, discrimination against Jews was official government policy in Germany ruled by the Nazis and the country became increasingly unsafe for her, her two siblings and her mother. However, Henny's brother, Heinz, managed to escape to South America. Meanwhile "the window for emigration from Germany was being boarded up" (Seth 105) and the amount of possibilities for migrating dwindled. About a month before the Second World War broke out, "Henny travelled by train from Berlin to Hamburg, then by boat to Southampton and by train to London" (108), but her sister and mother were unable to follow and "remained within the borders of their own hostile country" (108). By comparison, after Lenin and the Bolsheviks took power in Russia, Nabokov's father "decided to remain as long as possible in St Petersburg but to send his large family to the Crimea, a region that was still free" (Nabokov 183). According to Boyd's biography, the Nabokov family encountered many more tribulations than Nabokov relates in *Speak, Memory*. In his autobiography, Nabokov chooses to summarise his journey to Europe in just one sentence: "In 1919, by way of Crimea and Greece, a flock of Nabokovs – three families in fact – fled from Russia to Western Europe" (192). In *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*, Boyd relates many historical details regarding Russian and Crimean politics, and the order for evacuation following the advance of the Red army on Crimea. However, the French command blocked the departure of the ship, named the *Nadezhda*, carrying the Nabokovs because the French blocked their escape: "the French Command demanded to know why nothing remained of the government's funds in the State bank of Sebastopol and insisted on having all the money handed to them" (Boyd *Russian* 159). When permission to depart was finally given, the Bolshevik forces were already close enough to be in viewing range: "Machine guns were firing from the shore as the *Nadezhda* zigzagged out to the harbor and across a glassy bay" (160). Next, the vessel was anchored at Constantinople, but was given no permission to land "[s]ince Constantinople was already overcrowded with refugees" (163). The voyage continued to Athens where the Nabokov family was allowed to disembark. They spent three and a half weeks in Greece after the ship was kept in quarantine for two days (163-64). Subsequently, the journey continued by boat to Marseilles and "[f]rom there the Nabokovs took a train straight to Paris" (164). It could be argued that Nabokov does consider his flight from Russia an important part from his life, because many of the characters in his works share the trait of having migrated from Russia with their creator. It would seem that the flight of the *Nadezhda* was eventful enough, and possibly traumatic enough as well, to serve as a literary theme, but it is not seen in *Speak, Memory*. This omission may be compared to Henny's silence regarding the prosecution of Jews and the Second World War in general towards her

relatives. Granted, Nabokov does go into detail regarding many other occurrences during the Russian revolution and the Second World War, but this specific part of his flight may simply have been too traumatic to explore. A possible reason that other events were depicted by Nabokov could lie in the fact that Nabokov based many of his characters and stories on himself, so his work would have required him to explore at least some of his traumatic memories as well. For Henny, who was not a writer, this is not the case, so it was not necessary for her to revive traumas from the past and Seth was unable to talk to her about them, or at least felt anxious enough not to bring up the subject matter. The fact remains that the forced migration of Henny and Nabokov influenced them profoundly and had a lasting effect on their identity and who they were as an individual.

After their studies in England, Nabokov and Sergey, his brother, separated; Sergey went to Paris and Nabokov went to Berlin. Nabokov had already published some of his works, but, according to Boyd, the newspaper *Rul'* provided him with a platform for many of his works (Boyd *Russian* 179). In Berlin, he married Véra and their son Dmitri was also born there. However, the Nazi's took control of Germany and the country became increasingly dangerous for Véra, who was Jewish. Furthermore, there is also a personal matter which drove Nabokov from Germany. In *Speak, Memory*, he mentions that

a certain night in 1922, at a public lecture in Berlin, when [his] father shielded the lecturer (his old friend Milyukov) from the bullets of two Russian Fascists and, while vigorously knocking down one of the assassins, was fatally shot by the other.

(Nabokov 146)

The murder of his father is shocking and traumatic for Nabokov, but the event itself is not a reason to flee Berlin. However, the release of his father's assassin who, to add insult to injury "during World War Two, Hitler made administrator of émigré Russian affairs," (Nabokov 133) contributed to the sharp decrease of safety Nabokov was able to provide for him and his family. As a result, Nabokov is forced into exile again, this time with his wife and son as well. However, this flight is hardly recorded in *Speak, Memory*. Boyd does go into detail when explaining the circumstances of Nabokov in Germany in 1936. A combination of an attempt to register all Russian émigrés in Germany and Goebbels' desire to "Nazify" all cultural expressions in Germany led Nabokov to search for employment in the English-speaking world (Boyd *Russian* 430) and "[o]n January 18, 1937, he left Berlin" (431). However, his flight from Nazi Germany did not end there and Nabokov was already planning to move to America when the German Blitzkrieg tactics proved to be a success in the invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg (520-21). This meant that Paris, the current home of

Nabokov, was in danger of being invaded by the Germans as well. Even after obtaining a passport and an American visa, the boat fare was still a problem, but various wealthy Jewish families and some old friends raised money for the Nabokov's and they were able to leave France with the German front following them rapidly (521-22). In other words, Nabokov was unable to find a safe home for him and his family in Berlin or in Paris.

Vikram Seth comments on the issues of belonging and feeling at home and asks "Where did Shanti and Henny belong, if not in the world of a family or a circle of friend? Which country did they belong to?" (Seth 400). The fact that Shanti joined the British army and lost an arm while serving in Italy during the Second World War suggests a certain degree of loyalty, but there were many Indians recruited in India and serving as soldiers in Europe, so it is unlikely that this was able to shift his identity as an Indian towards being English. Seth states that "these two[, Shanti and Henny,] of the many rooted exiles of the twentieth century passed the years and decades of the latter half of their lives feeling neither very much at home nor very obviously foreign in a land that could be seen as either coolly indifferent or blessedly uninterfering, even tolerant" (401). This statement about England is supported by Shanti "who averred on more than one occasion that he had never faced anything like racism in England" (396) and by Seth himself when he relates how "Tonbridge, Oxford and the part of London [he] saw as a student, if anything, was intolerant of intolerance" (394). Nevertheless, Vikram Seth's brother, Shantum, relates how the English were not all alike in their attitude towards foreigners as he faced hatred and racial tension while studying in Leicester (393-94) which Seth only experienced once while visiting his brother. As a result, Shantum became politically active and even joined organisations like the Anti-Nazi League (395). The difference experienced when interaction occurred between the English population and the Indian Seths is an example of how *Two Lives* "is not just about migrants' lives: it is also about how the lives of cosmopolitan migrants and non-migrants intersect" (Bagchi 106). These issues regarding identity in exile arise in *Speak, Memory* as well. For example, the contact Russian exiles had with their receiving country was insignificant and Nabokov describes the local population as "perfectly unimportant strangers, spectral Germans and Frenchmen in whose more or less illusory cities we, émigrés, happened to dwell" (209). In some cases contact was limited to experiences with the local bureaucrats. Nabokov describes the ordeals surrounding the issue of official documents in his autobiography:

Our utter physical dependence on this or that nation, which had coldly granted us political refuge, became painfully evident when some trashy 'visa,' or some diabolical 'identity card' had to be obtained or prolonged. (Nabokov 210)

He also describes how

The League of Nations equipped émigrés who had lost their Russian citizenship with a so-called ‘Nansen’ passport (...) Its holder was little better than a criminal on parole and had to go through most hideous ordeals every time he wished to travel from one country to another (...). (Nabokov 210)

Naturally, there are notable differences when comparing the experiences of interaction with the non-migrants in the receiving country of the Seths to those of Nabokov, but there are also similarities. Nabokov does not mention encountering any form of discrimination that could be labelled as racism like Shantum did, but he did feel discriminated against as an exile because of the bureaucratic measures he describes. In other words, he does not describe hatred, but it was clear that Nabokov was not regarded as a fellow citizen nor wanted as such. It would seem that most of the exiled characters in *Speak, Memory* and *Two Lives* did not experience a sense of feeling at home and belonging in the country they fled to.

The concept of the diaspora can be found in both *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory*. For example, Nabokov gives a reason why Russians in exile continued to be Russian:

In Berlin and Paris, the two capitals of exile, Russians formed compact colonies, with a coefficient of culture that greatly surpassed the cultural mean of the necessarily more diluted foreign communities among which they were placed. Within those colonies, they kept to themselves. (Nabokov 210)

In other words, the émigrés clung to each other and shared a common culture which they brought with them from their country of origin. Nabokov and his father were very active in the community of Russian émigrés in Berlin. Most notably, Nabokov’s father worked for the liberal newspaper *Rech’* before he went into exile and he continued to be involved in publicising his opinion as editor of “the liberal émigré daily *Rul’*” in Berlin (Nabokov 132-33). Boyd supplies us with even more information and relates the process of finding a name for the new paper: “The name *Rul’* (*The Rudder*) had at last been settled upon, largely because in Russian it has the same number of letters as *Rech’* and its masthead could mimic that of its predecessor” (Boyd *Russian* 179). Apparently not worth mentioning by Nabokov in *Speak, Memory*, *Rul’* was founded with the help of Nabokov’s father. This shows the level of involvement of the Nabokovs in the Russian community of Berlin. Furthermore, many of Nabokov’s early works were published in this new émigré medium (Boyd *Russian* 179, Nabokov 213). Nabokov used the pseudonym Sirin, but, in *Speak, Memory*, he provides an image of Sirin as if it were another person: “the author that interested me most was naturally Sirin. He belonged to my generation” (Nabokov 219). It would seem that Nabokov’s presence

in the émigré community added two people to the total number of Russians in Berlin: Sirin, Nabokov's alter ego and author of literary works for the émigré community, and Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, a Russian student at Cambridge whose family lives in Berlin. A full analysis of the creation and existence of the Sirin persona may be the main topic of another paper, but a plausible explanation might be that Nabokov, while in England for his studies, wanted to maintain a bond with the people he felt most connected with: the liberal émigré Russians in Berlin and of course his family. So although Nabokov was not physically in Berlin, Sirin continued to be part of the community.

In *Two Lives*, Seth relates an Indian event in Berlin after the rise of the Nazis, but before the outbreak of the Second World War which suggests that Germany's capital also hosted a community of Indian exiles. Seth notes that Shanti was not interested in politics very much, but still chose to visit an Indian speech in Berlin once:

When an Indian freedom-fighter (...) came to Berlin and spoke to the students, Shanti went to hear him. Years later, he was to discover that his movements and those of other Indian students in Berlin had been monitored by the British Embassy with the help of informants in order to chart and, if possible, suppress, Indian nationalist currents abroad. (Seth 91-92)

Nabokov and Shanti experiences differ in the sense that the Nabokovs chose to seek out their fellow Russians while Shanti, apart from visiting a speech once, deliberately chose to befriend Germans instead of Indians. It appears that he was successful in doing so because "Shanti said that during his years in Berlin he never felt excluded as a foreigner: his teachers treated him well and he was invited to the homes of some of his German fellow students" (Seth 93).

Although Shanti was not as active in the Indian community as the Nabokovs in the Russian community, it is striking to see that Berlin hosted both a Russian community, in exile because of the Russian revolution, and an Indian community, in exile because of the resistance against the British colonial power, during the interbellum. The hatred and the atrocities of the Second World War were just a few years away, but the capitol of the main aggressor in Europe proved to be a safe haven for political refugees at that time.

Although they are lesser characters in the two works, Henny and Véra are of course part of the Jewish culture that sparked the word diaspora, albeit translated into Greek. Cohen notes that "[s]ince the Babylonian exile, "the homelessness of Jews has been a leitmotiv in Jewish literature, art, culture, and of course, prayer"" (qtd in Cohen 22). Likewise, "Jewish folklore and its strong oral tradition retold stories of the perceived, or actual, trauma of their historical experiences" (Cohen 22). Therefore, the presence of a Jewish character can

influence a narrative and add a layer of tradition to the themes of exile and diaspora. In *Speak, Memory*, it is suggested that Véra is the one being spoken to in chapter fifteen, but she appears to be invisible during most of the narrative. It could be argued that chapter fifteen serves as an indicator for the other chapters, because the other chapters are written in a first person perspective, but the sudden shift to the second person perspective in chapter fifteen could suggest that all the chapters are written for Véra. This could explain why Nabokov's memories about her are not related in the work. One might also argue that *Speak, Memory* was written for Véra because the work was dedicated to her, but Nabokov dedicated all the works he wrote in English to her. In short, although Véra is not a recognisable character in *Speak, Memory*, her Jewishness influenced both the narrative and the lives of Nabokov and his family, because it made fleeing from the Nazis more urgent.

Both Vikram and Shanti notice that Henny, while still alive, was unwilling to talk about her Jewish heritage. Moreover, many relatives of Shanti, including Vikram Seth's parents, are even unaware of the fact that she is Jewish. Seth's mother recounts that

In fact, we didn't even know she was Jewish for quite a long time. Uncle once remarked, after they returned from a trip to Switzerland, "Some Germans were there and it spoiled Henny's holiday." I didn't understand it – after all, she was German too – but I was always reluctant to ask questions. (Seth 387)

Only when a trunk with letters is found in the attic Henny's voice can be heard in full. So whereas Nabokov does not provide a voice for Véra and her Jewish heritage in *Speak, Memory*, Seth does provide one for Henny, but he also shares his doubts with the reader:

Indeed, considering the private person she was, I have sometimes wondered whether I should (...) even after her death, have ranged freely over her correspondence (...). But these letters deal with a period of great historical consequence in Germany and may help to enrich, through their intimacy, our understanding of the lives of ordinary people caught up in the events of those times. (Seth 188)

In other words, Seth connects the large scale of the diaspora caused by Hitler's politics to the personal stories of Henny and her friends and family, and states that "[w]hat happened in Henny's circle of friends was replicated throughout the country and beyond" (Seth 350). Furthermore, he notes how many of these people were scattered around the globe in countries like Sweden, the United States, China, South-Africa and Australia, but that they were still Jewish and German as well. For example, he quotes a friend of Henny's and Shanti's who wrote about his struggles when trying to obtain an American visa in a letter: "Just imagine, I have not received an answer for nine months and have to fear that I will not get a permit

because I am a German” (351). Ironically, when describing the period when Shanti first met Henny and her family, the Caros, Seth notes how they “never thought of themselves as anything other than German” (84). The theme of the diaspora is embodied by Henny in various ways. On the one hand, she carries the Jewish tradition of a people scattered over different countries with her. On the other hand, she identified herself as German because she was born and raised in Germany, and it seems that the Caros adapted to their host country to the point that they considered themselves a part of the German society rather than the Jewish diaspora. However, the Nazis thought differently and labelled them as Jewish rather than German. The result is that Henny, as a Jewish exile, became part of the old Jewish tradition again.

The portrayal of Henny’s Jewishness is subject to debate, for example by Anna Guttman. On the one hand, it could be argued that Seth attempted to create a complete picture of Henny by researching her letters and her loved ones in combination with historical facts previously unexplored by him. According to Bagchi, Henny as a Jew shows “a special kind of Jewish cosmopolitanism. Yet as Vikram represents her, Henny is also a typical, fun-loving, hardworking young German working woman” (Bagchi 106). On the other hand, it could also be argued that Henny’s portrayal as more than Jewish in fact undermines her Jewish background. In contrast to Bagchi, Guttman heavily criticises “how vigilantly the biographer ignores Henny’s Jewishness prior to the archive’s appearance” (Guttman 511). Nevertheless, Seth does explain that the topics Jewishness and the Holocaust are perceived, by him and other members of the Seth family, as a taboo. In fact, he states that “[e]ven if she had been alive, the circumstances of her early life would have made [him] very reluctant to [interview her]” (Seth 51). However, Guttman notes that “[w]hat Seth does not explain here is the source of this reluctance” (Guttman 511) and, Guttman continues, “[i]f Henny herself preferred not to be asked about her past, Seth never directly tells us so; the reader is left to suppose that Seth himself has imposed this silence” (511). Moreover, Seth’s portrayal of Henny as not just a Jewish woman, but also a German woman is interpreted by Guttman as an “immediate denial of a revelation of Jewishness” (511) and concludes that “Henny’s Jewishness and all that it entails thus spills uncomfortably into a text whose original purpose was to recount the life of a hybrid and unusual South Asian subject” (512). However, although it was indeed Seth’s initial intention to write about his uncle, he included not just Henny, but also himself. Therefore, it could be argued that the work’s title could also have been *Three Lives* instead of *Two Lives*. Moreover, he chose to portray other persons, like some friends of Henny, as well.

It seems that *Two Lives* is the story that Seth wishes to tell which includes the cosmopolitan, and more complete, version of Henny.

Involuntary travel movements are not restricted to those directly in danger, like the Liberal Aristocrat Nabokov in revolutionary Russia and the Jewish Henny and Véra in Nazi-Germany. Shanti was unable to find employment in Germany as a dentist nor as an academic. In fact, Shanti's professor was scolded for trying to enlist Shanti as one of his assistants:

He[, the professor,] handed [Shanti] the letter he had received a few minutes earlier from the Ministry of Education, upbraiding him as a [NSDAP] Party member for having taken on a foreign student as an assistant when there were so many German students still unemployed. (Seth 99)

This unfortunate event did not put Shanti into danger, but it did discourage him from trying to maintain a life in Germany. Instead, he went to Edinburgh to obtain another classification as dentist because his German education was not valid in Britain (99). Nevertheless, in contrast to Nabokov's resolute abandonment of Germany, "homesick for his friends in Germany and worried that, if war were to break out, he would not be able to see them, Shanti went back to Berlin in December 1937" (101). Seth notes that "[m]eanwhile, the window for emigration from Germany was being boarded up," (105) so Shanti's temporary visit to Berlin was, especially with today's knowledge that the most devastating global event of the twentieth century was to happen not long after that, quite a daring enterprise.

It could be argued that the term danger can be seen in more than one way. In *Two Lives*, Seth comments on leaving a country and choosing not to return:

In Shanti's case, the exile was of his making; not so with Henny, though it could in some sense be said that she chose not to return when, once again, it became safe to do so. (Seth 403)

In other words, Henny was in danger when fleeing from Germany and she chose to stay in England when the danger was gone. By comparison, Nabokov also fled from Germany and, according to Boyd, "[n]ever again would he set foot on German soil" (431). It could be argued that the Second World War with its accompanying Holocaust left such a grave mark that both Henny and Nabokov could not bear to be reminded of the atrocities of the era by revisiting the Germany.

In conclusion, *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory* portray the lives of globalised people whose identity is formed by their cosmopolitanism. Of all the characters discussed, Vikram Seth was in the most comfortable position because he was able to make his choices to travel and to migrate during times of peace. Therefore, the interaction he experienced with non-

migrants in the countries he visited was not affected by necessity. Vladimir Nabokov was encouraged by his parents to pursue experience and knowledge outside of Russia, but the Russian revolution and the Second World War provided him with a critical reason to go abroad. The combination of a lack of choice to travel and a lack of choice whether or not to mingle with the Germans, the French and the English, and the inability to revisit the sites from his childhood had an impact in how he developed himself as an individual. Like Nabokov, Shanti Seth was also encouraged to go abroad, but he found himself in the middle of the Second World War which forced him to make choices he would otherwise not have made. His path from India via Germany to England caused him to struggle with his identity and it turned him into, for lack of better wording, a Germanised Indian in England. Henny, who perceived herself as a German, was forced into exile because of her Jewish ancestry. The rich traditions of being Jewish influenced who she was because of the state instituted anti-Semitism of the Nazis. What *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory* have in common when looking at the way migration influenced the people involved is that migration is bound to have an effect on an individual. However, the extent to which migration influences and alters an individual's identity is larger when migration is by choice while a forced form of migration can lead to traumas or it can aggravate existing traumas.

Language and Identity in *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory*

Both Vikram Seth's *Two Lives* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* show how language impacted the lives of people depicted in the works. A distinction can be made between languages learnt out of absolute necessity and languages learnt after, or in combination with, certain choices made. When regarding the subject matter in terms of pure linguistics, there is no difference in second language acquisition whether a language learner chooses to learn or is obligated to learn a new language. However, since language can be an important part of an individual's identity and since there is "a long history of scholarship that relies implicitly on identity to understand the relationship between language and culture" (Bucholtz and Hall 387), the distinction based on motivation can reveal the attitude towards other speakers of the language or the country in which the language is used by the state. Although the nature of the first language is already a major aspect of one's identity, learning a second language can open doors and allow influences from other cultures to alter the Self. Both *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory* depict the impact language can have on a person's identity.

When regarding multilingualism, Vladimir Nabokov is an extraordinary case, because he is tutored in Russian, French and English during his childhood. In *Speak, Memory*, he relates how the "English and French governesses [he and his brother] had in [their] childhood were eventually assisted, and finally superseded, by Russian-speaking tutors" (Nabokov 114). As a result, because of his childhood tutoring in three languages, he is proficient in all three languages. Moreover, it could be argued that the term trilingual is a proper description for Nabokov. According to Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, in the Nabokov household, "English was the second domestic language rather than French" (Beaujour 37). However, Nabokov provides an explanation for the presence of the English language in his family: "The kind of Russian family to which I belonged (...) had, among other virtues, a traditional leaning towards the comfortable products of Anglo-Saxon civilization" (Nabokov 53). Apparently, either the English language came with the products, or the English language was one of the products used by the Nabokovs, but it is a likely scenario that English was imported. Regardless, Nabokov states that he "learned how to read English before [he] could read Russian" (53). Furthermore, Nabokov does not discuss the French language as extensively as he describes his early relationship with the English language in his autobiography. This could be due to the fact that French was the language of the Tsars, the upper class and the aristocrats

in Russia and, since Nabokov grew up in a rich family, he could have been used to the presence of the French language. In fact, Nabokov describes how one of his Russian tutors “could not quite stomach certain aspects of [the Nabokov] household, such as footmen and French, which last he considered an aristocratic convention of no use in a liberal’s home” (81-82). This exemplifies the duality of the Nabokovs: liberal political views, but aristocratic in many other aspects with the use of the French language being one of those.

In her article “Bilingualism,” Beaujour states that “Nabokov should be seen as one of the most distinctive twentieth-century examples of a category once widespread and now almost extinct: the bilingual, or, in Nabokov’s case, the trilingual, writer” (Beaujour 37). As a result, many of his works are littered with expressions taken from Russian, French and English. Many protagonists created by Nabokov speak at least two languages. For instance, Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* is fluent in French and English. Although the ability to speak these languages is not vital to the plot, Humbert’s intellect and proficiency in these languages is a major part of the protagonist’s character description. Another example is the alternate universe of *Ada* in which all major characters appear to be trilingual. In fact, they are not only switching languages, but even code switching can be seen throughout the novel. Code switching, using words from one native language while speaking another native language, plays a part in many of the allusions in *Ada*. In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov describes how code switching, without using this term, played a role in his life as he was accused of showing of “by peppering [his] Russian papers with English and French terms, which came naturally to [him]” (Nabokov 140).

Vikram Seth grew up as a monolingual, but he could have been a bilingual if he had lived with his parents instead of with his grandmother. When Seth’s parents lived in England during his very early childhood, he was taken care of by Amma, his grandmother. He relates how this came to pass in *Two Lives*:

When I began to speak, Amma insisted that it be in Hindi and only in Hindi. She herself was perfectly bilingual, but had decided that I would get more than enough English in England. As a result, when I was delivered to my parents in London, they found that I couldn’t speak or understand a word of the local language. (Seth 5)

Nevertheless, Seth has shown that he has the ability and the perseverance to learn new languages quickly. Furthermore, along the direction of thinking displayed by Amma’s insistence on having Seth speak Hindi, his mother “was not at all keen that [he] go to England on [his] own: sex, drugs and general dissipation were what she feared” (8). In a way, whereas Nabokov was introduced to Anglo-Saxon influences, including the English language, at a

very early age, Seth was deprived of any English influences on purpose. He had to learn English for communicating with his aunt and uncle and for his studies at Tonbridge, but he does not go into learning the language in *Two Lives*. The difference between Nabokov and Seth when regarding language learning and identity is the age of onset; Nabokov was very young when he learnt more than one language while Seth was raised initially with just Hindi.

When Seth and the headmaster at Tonbridge decided that the next step of his education was to take place at Oxford, it turns out that “one had to have studied a European language to O-level standard to be accepted at the university” next to passing the special entrance exams (10). It could be argued that English as a European language would have been adequate, but apparently, this was not the case.

I wrote to the authorities, requesting an exemption, explaining that I had studied Hindi to the required level but that I would never have had the opportunity to study European languages at my school in India even if I had wished to. I was told that no waiver would be granted. (Seth 10)

Although he initially panicked at the thought of learning a language in six months that would normally require four to five years, his aunt and uncle encouraged him to persevere and they decided together that Seth would learn German as “it was clear that German was the right language for [him], because in the holidays [Henny] and Uncle would be able to help [him] where the school had left off” (10). For instance, Shanti and Henny organised lessons in German and arranged moments of practice in the form of visits from German friends. In other words, the help Seth received from them was more than just kind encouragement and moral support. Seth also relates how he received private lessons from a teacher at Tonbridge. Besides, he decides to travel through German-speaking countries during the summer as extra practice. Seth states that he “began to enjoy” the German language “after [his] initial resentment that [he] had to learn it at all and the shock of the genders and declensions” (11). Nonetheless, Seth had no real intention to study German before it turned out to be necessary in order to enter Oxford so he was shocked to hear that the entire enterprise of acquiring the German language was just a bureaucratic measure which was not even necessary. In fact, during the interview following the entrance exam, the interviewers were unaware of his performance of the translation test he took in order to obtain his O-level in German. Moreover, the interviewers stated that he should have asked them for exemption instead of asking the university authorities (20). Furthermore, they confirm Seth’s fear: “So, in a sense, my study of German has been entirely unnecessary?” (20).

However, in retrospect, it could be argued that it was not unnecessary at all for Seth to learn German, because it turned out to be a major addition to his life. Specifically, he felt that “[i]t was through [his] studies of German [that [his] relationship with [his aunt and uncle] deepened” (12) because he was able to understand the conversations they had and the small quarrels as well (11). Moreover, their relation deepened to such a degree that it influenced the way they connected as a family and Seth states that

(...) part of the reason that I graduated from ‘my husband’s nephew’ to ‘my nephew’ for Auntie Henny, and from ‘my nephew, to ‘my little son’ for Uncle, was that I had learned to share their language, and nothing spoken aloud at home remained veiled from me. (Seth 403)

Furthermore, it could also be argued that this encounter with language acquisition on the one hand and perseverance when learning on the other led him to pursue the acquisition of more languages. In fact, while at Oxford, he attempted to try a Japanese class, but “[e]ntering the wrong room, [he] found [himself] in a Chinese class instead” (23). He is thrown out of class after a few weeks because he was not registered, but he later becomes an official student of Chinese. Although “the Chinese language [was] distracting [him] from Economics,” (27) he managed to combine Chinese and economics by deciding “on a dissertation subject that would take [him] to China” (28). Furthermore, because he had “a friend whose family came from Wales,” he “had begun learning Welsh” (23). Bagchi notes that Seth “straddles English, Chinese, Hindi, and German and does not lose his Indian roots” (Bagchi 106). Therefore, he displays his own form of cosmopolitanism (106) which means in this case that he is able to be a globalised citizen while continuing to be an Indian as well. By the same token, although offering many critical comments on the portrayal of identity in Seth’s *Two Lives*, Guttman recognises that “Seth is able to move toward a globalized and cosmopolitan sense of South Asian identity that transcends the nation-state” (Guttman 514). Seth does describe an instance of homesickness as he “took a year off to return to India. [He] had been away too long and was homesick” (Seth 23). This instance underlines Seth’s early identity as an Indian without reducing his acquired global perspective, because he was abroad before experiencing homesickness and he returned to travelling after being in India. Furthermore, the languages he acquired stayed with him while he was not actively using them. So it could be argued that his identity as an Indian, even while in India, was significantly influenced by other languages and cultures.

Furthermore, next to portraying the acquisition of language, *Two Lives* and *Speak Memory* also portray the loss of language. In *Two Lives*, “Shanti over the years lost his ability

to speak Hindi, the language in which he would have felt most at ease for the first two decades of his life” (Seth 401). With Bagchi’s remark on *Two Lives* as a depiction of “how the lives of cosmopolitan migrants and non-migrants intersect” (Bagchi 106) in mind it could be argued that Shanti, most likely subconsciously, decided to trade part of his Indian identity for German aspects, like continuing to speak German, and possibly English aspects as well. For example, Seth notes that “Shanti, with his devotion to Simpson’s and Aquascutum, Jaeger and Austin reed, attired himself in the subdued taste of his third country” (Seth 400). In other words, the intersection of Shanti’s life with the non-migrants surrounding him caused him to be partly assimilated into both his new host societies. Henny comments on how she is influenced by her new English home because, for example, “she thinks she has become more ‘English’ in her appearance – a remark that Ilse[, a friend who stayed in Germany during and after the war,] asks her (in vain) to explain” (304), but Seth does not mention any degradation of her mother tongue. In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov describes how he was consciously avoiding the loss of language. It appears that, while studying at Cambridge in England, Nabokov worried over corrupting his skill in using the Russian language when surrounded by English speaking students. He describes

My fear of losing or corrupting, through alien influence, the only thing I had salvaged from Russia – her language – became positively morbid and considerably more harassing than the fear I was to experience two decades later of my never being able to bring my English prose anywhere close to the level of my Russian. (Nabokov 202)

On the one hand, in light of his recent flight from Russia, it is understandable for him to protect his language proficiency of Russian because Russia was in a transitory, post-revolutionary state in which many elements which Nabokov would have considered as typically Russian were under threat of being eliminated. In fact, free speech was under threat as well which means that it could be argued that the Russian language as Nabokov had experienced was also in danger. On the other hand, because Nabokov already grew up with Anglo-Saxon influences, the English language was already affecting the way he spoke and wrote in Russian. However, Nabokov claims that Cambridge “existed merely to frame and support [his] rich nostalgia” (198). At that time, with regard to the three languages of importance in his life, English was surrounding him and France could be visited to hear French, but the Russian language was almost unobtainable for the exiled Nabokov. Thus, connecting the loss of his Russian home to the possible loss of the accompanying language led to his fear of losing something profoundly Russian within him. In short, *Two Lives* and

Speak, Memory both portray a loss of language or the possibility of losing a language, and both texts connect this to identity and belonging to a country.

It is remarkable to see how language influenced Shanti during his transformation from an Indian into a Germanised Londoner. When interviewing him about his education in Berlin, Seth quotes that, before going there, his uncle “was still terrified at the thought of Berlin. [He] couldn’t speak a word of German” (Seth 75). Moreover, when he first heard the language being spoken he “was horrified by its difficulty and incomprehensibility” (75). Nevertheless, he decides to go anyway while carrying two dictionaries as his only reference to the German language. While attempting to find lodgings in Berlin, he turned out to be utterly lost and confused, but he just happened to run into a student who spoke “perfect English” (76) and directed him to the place apparently perceived by the student as the most logical place for an Indian to start his life in Berlin: an Indian restaurant. Following the directions to a pension given at the restaurant, he encounters the English language in Berlin again as the pension was “run by a lady from Oxford who spoke perfect English” (76). Although Shanti was rescued by “perfect English” twice, he made a rather radical choice in order to learn the German language. He made the decision to rent a room from people who were unable to speak English, thus forcing him to learn German (77). This manner of thinking led to an unusual situation when Shanti

found a flat where a mother and daughter were letting a room. They spoke only German and indicated to him that the arrangement would therefore be no good to him. He responded that it would indeed be very good for him, and took up residence there. (Seth 77)

It is unclear how and in what language Shanti responded, but he was able to find lodgings. He faced more challenges as a foreign dentistry student in Germany so he almost quits his studies in Berlin (78). He persevered and, though without Seth informing us further on Shanti’s general progress in learning German, he became a very fluent speaker of German.

Furthermore, German is not the only language Shanti has to learn for his education in dentistry. In fact, quite comparable to Seth suddenly having to learn one European language, Shanti was forced to obtain a Latin certificate and “[n]eedles to say, there had been neither reason nor occasion to study it, either at school or university, in India” (86), but he was nevertheless required to acquire yet another language quite quickly. Seth comments on the interview he had with Shanti: “While he was telling me this story, I was so gripped that my own parallel experience, almost forty years later, with German, did not even come to mind” (87). Just like Vikram Seth, Shanti Seth arranged extra lessons and devoted time, energy and

“a box of chocolates for a young typist in the Ministry” (87) to learning the Latin language and, after a resit, he passed. However, contrary to Seth who kept using German, Shanti exclaims that he “prayed to God to take all the Latin out of [his] system for ever” (88). It could be argued that this attitude exemplifies the difference between Seth’s and Shanti’s cosmopolitanism. Seth appears to collect different languages in order to be fluent around the world as a global citizen whereas Shanti shows a preference towards making a place his home and, in the process, favouring the language of that place over previously learnt languages. Granted, home should be seen in the broad sense of the word; Shanti continued to converse in German with Henny when they were living together in England.

For the first few years that they knew each other, [in Berlin], Shanti and Henny would have spoken nothing but German. Yet in England during the war, with German the suspect language of the enemy, they were compelled to write to each other in English. (...) But the language spoken at 18 Queens Road – when no one else was present – reverted to German. (Seth 403)

In other words, the German language acquired by Shanti could have been lost as well, but his attachment to Henny preserved it even though they had to avoid using it for a while. In a way, his connection with Henny became his home and Seth states that “each found in their fellow exile a home” (403).

In *Two Lives*, Seth describes how he almost lost a language, but it was not his language proficiency that was in danger. He states that “[o]ne of the casualties of the process of exploring the material for this book was [his] pleasure in the German language” (Seth 234). When researching the background and the possible fate of Henny’s sister and mother who stayed in Germany, Seth encountered many texts and documents in Germany and Israel written in German. He was able to read them, but the industrialised efficiency of transporting and killing Jews displayed in these documents made him detest the language itself. In order to appreciate the language again, he tries to read other German texts, but they “could not, after those two days in the archive at Yad Vashem, reconcile [him] to the language. The very verbs stank” (237). His revulsion of German only started to subside when he read some of the letters Henny and her friends wrote each other.

Slowly, through the humanity and the decency and, yes, the friendly but slightly catty gossip of these letters, a sense of ordinary life led by ordinary people displaced, or perhaps overlaid, my previous revulsion. My ability to read the language recovered (...). (Seth 238)

Granted, Seth may have dramatized the episode, but the fact that he decided to include this in his text means that he felt connected with the people he writes about. There is a duality which lies in the observation that he feels revulsion when reading German due to the injustice towards the Jewish people, but that he also states that the Caros saw themselves as German rather than Jewish and that he describes how Henny and Shanti continued to speak in German while living in England. This could be explained by the fact that Henny and Shanti had already passed away when Seth was doing his research so the emotional connection to the German language he felt via his relatives was weakened by their absence. By comparison, Shanti's ability to speak German persisted because of his bond with Henny. The examples of language loss or possible language loss depicted in *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory* show the connection between language and identity which can also reveal bonds between people.

Apart from the role that the themes of language acquisition and language itself play in *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory*, the fact that these works are written in English is relevant as well. Both works are written in an accessible form of English. Nabokov, known for his complex literary works, seems to sit down with the reader to tell a story instead of presenting puzzles like he does in many of his other works. Likewise, Seth uses a very informal register which does not require a high level of English proficiency. Since English is not the main language of the places where these writers grew up, looking at the Russian and Indian perception of the English language could provide another layer of meaning. In India, "English is considered to be a language of intellection, commerce and governance in India today. (...) English is clearly a language of the elite, confined for the most part to the university" (Kumar 26), partly because of the history of colonisation between India and the English speaking colonizer. Seth notes that English was "the language of advancement under the Empire" (Seth 58). Furthermore, Kumar states that "[i]t is a known social-linguistic phenomenon that the language variety of a politically dominant minority is treated as superior by the politically dominated majority" (Kumar 26). This explains why the English language is still a relevant factor in India because the formerly politically dominated Indian majority still treats the language of the British Empire, represented by a politically dominant minority of local rulers, as superior. This also explains why the French language continued to be a very important language in Russia for a long time, because the politically dominant aristocrats used French. Furthermore, it could be argued that this explains why Nabokov rarely translates French words and expressions in comparison to those in Russian in his works, because he expects his readers to know French because it is a superior language. Russian, spoken by the politically dominated majority of Russia, had not risen to this standard, so no one outside Russia was

expected to know it. According to Irina Ustinova, “[t]he expansion of English in Russia was (...) delayed because French, not English, was traditionally more popular as a means of interpersonal and even international communication in Russian society” (Ustinova 241). Furthermore, “[o]nly since 2000 has English replaced French as the language of official documents, such as foreign passports or drivers’ licenses issued for Russian travellers abroad,” (241) so, despite the love for the English language in Nabokov’s family, English was not a factor of importance in the beginning of the twentieth century in Russia. The difference between the status of the English language between India and Russia is striking because, although English is regarded highly in India and has almost no standard in Russia, Seth and Nabokov probably share their reason for writing in English: books written in English can be distributed across a larger market of potential readers. However, they also share the fact that English is used within their family, so nostalgia could play a role here as well.

For Nabokov, who became “an American citizen, an American writer, whose friends were almost all American rather than Russian” (Boyd *American* 13) and who was “finding himself instantly at home in a new country, on a new continent,” (4) the English language was not just one of the languages of his childhood. In fact, it was also the language of the United States; his new home which, in contrast to Germany and France, treated him with respect. Nevertheless, Boyd also notes how this may also have been part of an idealised version of America because he states that Nabokov, “isolated from Berlin by language and by choice, irked by his penniless and unsettled existence in Paris, (...) had found in America the fulfilment of his young dreams” (4). These dreams were fuelled by a story his mother told him about a boy who stepped into a painting in combination with the existence of a bog in the vicinity of the Nabokov residence which was “given the name “America” because of its mystery and remoteness” (4). Moreover, when Boyd discusses the fact that Nabokov chose to end the fifteenth chapter of his autobiography with a romantic description of the view to the ship that was to take him, Véra and his son to America,

Nabokov chose to end *Speak, Memory* by singling out a moment that looked ahead to a radiant America over the horizon. In fact the years between his arrival in the United States and his composing his autobiography had agonies of their own he simply chose to ignore. (Boyd *American* 5)

Furthermore, in contrast to the bureaucracy of Germany and France, “Nabokov recalled [the American citizenship test] with as much pleasure as his encounter with the sportive customs men on his first day in America” (87). In other words, the bureaucratic procedures of the former left a negative mark in Nabokov’s memory while the lenient treatment of regulations

in the United States provided a positive contrast compared to the French and the German rules. Therefore, it appears that, out of the three languages Nabokov could consider as his own, it was the English language that was spoken in the country in which he and his family were safe from events like the Russian Revolution and the Second World War.

In conclusion, both *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory* depict how language and identity can be connected in the life of a migrant. Multilingualism, either caused by migration or by education, plays a role in both works. All characters learn multiple languages, but Vikram Seth and Vladimir Nabokov appear to be the most flexible language learners: Seth learned many languages for various reasons and Nabokov wrote works in Russian, English and French and comments on language itself in many of his works. The main difference between Seth and Nabokov is that the latter learned more than one language from a very early age, while Seth was raised with just Hindi during his early childhood. Furthermore, both works describe the loss of language as well. Nabokov appeared to be fearful of losing his proficiency in Russian while he was studying in Cambridge and Seth describes how Shanti's proficiency in Hindi, the language from Shanti's youth, declined after he lived in Germany and England. However, the German language, although not needed when living in England, is preserved thanks to his relationship with Henny. Just like acquiring a new language, a decrease in language proficiency can reveal bonds between people as well. The fact that both *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory* are written in English while their respective authors originated in non-English speaking countries is significant, because it provides clues to the relation between Seth and Nabokov on the one hand and the English language on the other. It could be argued that their works would not have been written in English had their authors not been as cosmopolitan. Lastly, both works show that being forced to migrate can cause people to cling to the languages they already have as shown by Shanti and Nabokov, while migration by choice can make them more open minded to acquiring new languages as shown by Seth.

Conclusion

After reading *Two Lives* by Vikram Seth or *Speak, Memory* by Vladimir Nabokov, one can conclude that identity can be very complex and that migration can have a profound influence on the way a person experiences identity. After reading both, one can conclude that the migrant experience may differ from person to person, but that there are very notable similarities as well.

One of the themes that can be recognised in both works is the relationship between the migrant and the non-migrant. Although there are huge differences within a group of non-migrants, the non-migrant is fixed to a single country and it is thus very likely that non-migrants reason, act and live in accordance with the single perspective offered to them within that country. This means that, for instance, language is less of an issue in everyday life for a non-migrant.

The contrast between non-migrants and more globalised individuals, and their unexpected or uneasy relationship with language, is reflected in the two works. On the one hand, a globalised individual could have more experience with different languages than a non-migrant which can lead to irritation. In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov's teacher accuses him of showing off when Nabokov used English and French words in a Russian assignment. On the other hand, a migrant could have less experience with language than expected of him. In *Two Lives*, Shanti and Vikram Seth were forced to learn an extra language, Latin for Shanti and German for Seth, as part of their studies, but although acquiring these languages may not have been a challenge for a European, it certainly was for these two Indians who did not have the means nor a reason to come into contact with these specific languages before. In other words, Seth and Nabokov exemplify issues of language which can be encountered during situations where migrants and non-migrants come into contact. Both works show the connection between identity as perceived by the Self and identity as perceived by others which can influence the Self. All characters depicted seem to struggle with a sense of belonging as they are continuously influenced by the different people surrounding them. Therefore, *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory* offer a personal window into the lives of migrants for the non-migrant who may be unable to grasp the connection between migration and identity.

Migration can be a life defining choice, but not all migration takes place by choice. Both works show migration by choice and migration out of necessity. Vikram Seth has the luxury of travelling and migrating without disturbance from external factors, like political unrest. By contrast, Henny was forced to flee her home in Germany due to the anti-Semitic

laws of the Nazis because of her Jewish background. The possibilities of choice and necessity appear to be combined in both Shanti and Nabokov. Shanti chose to travel from India to Germany for his studies and he seemed to consider this country his new home. However, the Second World War forced him to leave Germany. Nabokov was raised in an internationally oriented family, but the Nabokovs were forced to go into exile due to the Russian revolution. After fleeing Russia, Nabokov was free to travel between Berlin, Paris and Cambridge. However, like Shanti, he was forced to leave Berlin due to the Second World War. Furthermore, the advancing front forced him into exile for a third time when he had to leave Paris for America. There is a difference between forced migration and voluntary migration in the way migrants interact with the non-migrants in a receiving country. For instance, the Nabokovs hardly interacted with the local population of Berlin or Paris, but Nabokov was more open to the American people and he even tried to become an American author rather than a Russian author. By the same token, Shanti chose to migrate to Germany and adapted to the local population, but he continued to speak German at home when he lived in England.

This paper focusses on the relation between migration and identity. Naturally, *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory* depict many more themes worth researching. For instance, the issue of family members living far from each other while still perceiving each other as close relatives can be seen in both works. Likewise, the Holocaust had a major impact on the characters depicted. Furthermore, the conflation of the author, the narrator and the author as character in his own work is taken for granted in this paper and further research could be done on the autobiographical elements in both texts.

These works depict how migration influences identity, but they also show the difference between choice and exile. In short, *Two Lives* and *Speak, Memory* show that forced migration can cause protectiveness over the already present identity, and that migration by choice can influence identity to a large extent by way of mingling language and culture.

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